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Johnson Reveals 2000-mph Plane Built in Secrecy

Missile-Shaped Interceptor Tops Any in World

By John G. Norris
Staff Reporter

President Johnson disclosed at a news conference yesterday that the United States secretly has developed a 2000-mile-an-hour fighter-interceptor plane superior to "any other aircraft in the world today."

The missile-shaped, experimental Air Force A-11, carrying its own intercept radar, could streak from U.S. bases to shoot down attacking enemy bombers beyond the Arctic Circle within 45 minutes.

It is designed to fill two major pending gaps in American air defense:

1. To overcome the high vulnerability of present North American Air Defense Command ground control centers—upon which existing interceptors are dependent — to Russian ICBM attack;

2. To counter future supersonic Soviet bombers or long-range air-launched standoff missiles.

Can Seek Out Bombers

The extraordinary new interceptor, of course, could not do anything to stop ICBMs from blasting the above ground air defense control centers, but it would be able to seek out and destroy enemy bombers at long range independently of guidance from the ground radar installations.

Existence of the Lockheed A-11, which was initiated in 1959, has been one of the best kept military secrets in years. In congressional testimony and public speeches, Air Force chiefs have been urging that the Administration give approval for starting development of an improved manned interceptor or "IMI."

The A-11 is the IMI and the Air Force campaign for it has been to win approval not of its development — already nearly complete—but for production and deployment of the plane.

Decision Awaited

There has been no decision as yet, either by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara or the President, as to whether the United States needs a new air defense interceptor, or if it does, whether the A-11 is the answer.

Some of McNamara's top advisers feel that the Navy version of the TFX, which will be a carrier-based interceptor firing a new Phoenix air-to-air missile, being developed by Hughes Aircraft, can do the job at lower cost.

The decision probably will come later when there is more intelligence data on whether the Russians are developing a supersonic bomber, or long-range air-to-ground "standoff" missiles, like the U.S. Hound Dog and the now abandoned Skybolt, which can be launched

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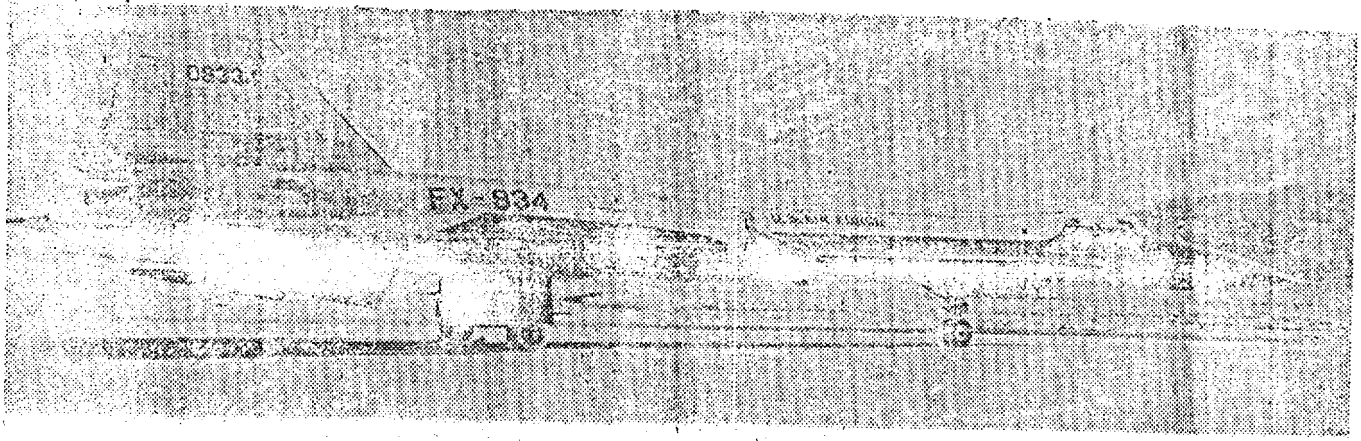
from bombers outside the range of air defenses.

In announcing that the A-11 had been "successfully developed," President Johnson stressed that the major advances in aeronautics achieved were "of great significance to both military and commercial application." Existence of the A-11 was disclosed, he said, in order to permit the "orderly exploitation of this advanced technology" in both fields.

Photographs of the plane released yesterday disclosed it to be a long, needle-nosed craft, with apparently short stubby wings set far back toward the tail. It seems quite similar to the X-15, although its two Pratt and Whitney J-58 jet engines are set farther out on the wing than the X-15's rocket motors.

The President said the A-11 already has been tested at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.,



Associated Press

President Johnson announced the development of this 2000-mph-plus jet interceptor at his news conference.

in "sustained flight at more than 2000 miles an hour, and at altitudes in excess of 70,000 feet." Several A-11s are undergoing tests, he said.

Mr. Johnson spoke only of the A-11 having a range of "thousands of miles," but the IMI has been expected to have a 3000-mile range, or 1200-mile radius of action.

In referring to the technological lessons learned from the A-11, the President said that one of the most important has been the "mastery of the metallurgy and fabrication of titanium metal which is required for the high temperatures experienced by aircraft traveling at more three times the speed of sound."

Existing U.S. warplanes, which fly at a top speed of about 1600 miles an hour, are made of aluminum, which cannot stand the friction-generated heat encountered at higher speeds. Many engineers have held the view that titanium would not do for the speed attained by the A-11, and that stainless steel—presenting new problems—would be required.

In view of the announced successes with titanium, reporters raised questions about the testimony of Defense Department witnesses in the TFX investigation, who said Boeing's proposed "risky" use of titanium was one reason for giving the award of the fighter to General Dynamics.

Government sources said that technical knowledge about the use of titanium gained in the A-11 development enabled them to better evaluate the way Boeing proposed employing it. This implied that the planned use in the A-11 was different from that proposed by Boeing, but the matter was not fully explained.

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